



**Speech by the President of Iceland
Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson
at a luncheon for
the Prime Ministers of the Nordic Countries
and
the Prime Minister of Japan
at Bessastaðir, June 22 1999**

It is a particular pleasure for me to welcome honourable and distinguished guests here to Bessastaðir, the leaders of our Nordic brethren and neighbours and also of our friends from Japan.

This harmonious gathering of Prime Ministers at the ancient seat of Icelandic authority inevitably calls to mind the events of history. It was on this hill that a settler from mainland Scandinavia first chose to make his home around the year 900. Then, just over three centuries later, Snorri Sturluson came here from Reykholt and continued his great task of presenting the Icelanders and our Nordic cousins with immortal literature in the epic sagas and in his accounts of the ancient mythology in the Edda poems which later became treasured by the whole world.

In this historic place where the origin of our nation can be traced, where poets and scholars for centuries sought inspiration and wisdom, where the Republic found its heart, we welcome distinguished and dear friends who have assembled here to consolidate their joint determination to strive together for a world dedicated to universal freedom and prosperity.

In welcoming the Prime Minister of Japan to this Nordic table we honour not only the history of our peoples but also celebrate our common vision of the future.

Our nations – the Nordic countries and Japan; so far in distance and yet so near in aspirations – are determined to make democracy and human rights the cornerstones of global co-operation in the 21st century.

We are dedicated to the goals of bringing prosperity and equal opportunities to men and women alike, and of directing trade and economic policies towards sustaining growth and progress for the benefit of all.

Together the Nordic countries and Japan have called for the strengthening of the United Nations, for reforms of the Security Council, and for the realisation of the fundamental role which the creators of the United Nations institutions deemed necessary in order to bring about the peaceful resolution of conflicts and guarantee the right of every nation to security and peace.

Our ancestors, whether in the north or in the island communities of Japan, farmers and fishermen, who for centuries challenged the oceans and cultivated the soil, they learned to respect the forces of nature and value the riches of the land, of the forests and the fields, of the seas, the rivers and the lakes.

On the volcanic terrain of Iceland and Japan we humbly accept the enormity of the forces still at work in the Earth's centre. We are reminded again and again that despite the collective strength of science and technology we are not yet and never will be the masters of the Universe.

We have inherited the Earth only to preserve it and to guard all its plants and living creatures so that future generations will be able to enjoy the wonders of creation in all their splendour.

The sense of community is the essence of the traditions inherited by my nation and the people of the country so eminently represented by our honoured guest the Prime Minister of Japan.

The spirit and vision of islanders are shared by the people of Iceland and Japan and so is our respect for ancient cultures glorified in heroic sagas and songs. The identity of both our nations is deeply rooted in literary heritage, time-honoured wisdom which will guide us towards the future.

This assembly of leaders from Japan and the Nordic countries is a manifestation of how truly global mankind has become in our joint search for a better world.

At the crossroads not only of a new century but also of a new millennium the co-operation and productive agreements between the peoples of Japan and the Nordic countries are signposts for others to follow.

With high hopes for the continuation of our friendship and co-operation, I ask you to join me in raising your glasses and saluting the inspiration and the wisdom which has brought our nations together.